



UNHRC

STUDY GUIDE

AGENDA

**ADDRESSING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS
AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA WORKERS**

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INTRODUCTION TO THE UN

The United Nations is an international organization founded in 1945. Currently made up of 193 Member States, the UN and its work are guided by the purposes and principles contained in its founding Charter. The UN has evolved over the years to keep pace with a rapidly changing world. But one thing has stayed the same: it remains the one place on Earth where all the world's nations can gather together, discuss common problems, and find shared solutions that benefit all of humanity.

The main purpose of the United Nations is to maintain international peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations, promote human rights, and encourage international cooperation in addressing global challenges. The organization serves as a global platform where countries can collaborate to address common challenges such as conflict, poverty, inequality, climate change, and humanitarian crises. It operates under the principle of sovereign equality, where every member state has equal representation in the General Assembly, regardless of its economic or political stature. Through its various organs, agencies, and offices located in New York, Geneva, Vienna, and Nairobi, the UN continues to play a central role in promoting peace, security, development, and human rights worldwide.

COMMITTEE OVERVIEW

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is an intergovernmental body within the United Nations system that focuses on upholding and protecting Human Rights according to Article 1.3 of the UN Charter, which frames the organization's interest in “encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms”. Established by UNGA Resolution 60/251 (2006), the Council replaced the former UN Commission on Human Rights. The Council receives substantive and technical support from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

The Council operates via a Complaint Procedure which enables individuals and organizations to bring information regarding human rights violations to the attention of the UNHRC. The UNHRC also incorporates Special Procedures, including Special Rapporteurs and independent experts who monitor and address specific human rights issues and country situations. The Council adopts resolutions and decisions, conducts the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of all UN Member States, and establishes commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions to investigate serious human rights violations.

OVERVIEW OF THE AGENDA

UNHRC is tasked with addressing human rights violations against Journalists and Media Workers, particularly in environments where freedom of expression and access to information is restricted. Journalists play an important role in conflicts, bringing us live feeds and news about the situation, such as casualties, developments, and implications. Media workers contribute to the dissemination of information, public awareness, and communication during times of crisis, conflict, and peacetime. In authoritarian regimes, Media workers and journalists play a very crucial role in exposing the regime's realities, as they expose abuses, ensure transparency, and safeguard the rights and dignity of individuals.

Despite existing legal protections, attacks on journalists continue to occur in many conflict zones. In numerous states, they face intimidation, arbitrary detention, enforced disappearance, digital surveillance, and extrajudicial violence merely for exercising their right to freedom of expression, rights which are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Others may face restrictions through censorship, media controls, internet shutdowns, and restrictive legislation

(defamation laws, incitement, hatred laws) through control or heavily limited media outlets, banned coverage of sensitive issues, and selective or manipulated information being publicized.

The United Nations adopted the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity in 2012, led by UNESCO. The Plan aims to prevent attacks, protect journalists, and hold those responsible for crimes against media workers accountable. According to UNESCO, more than 1,600 journalists have been killed since 1993, and in approximately 90% of cases the perpetrators are never brought to justice. This committee plans to address this situation and how Journalists and Media workers can be protected throughout with new measures if necessary.

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Media workers:

Any individual involved in producing, gathering, editing, publishing, broadcasting, promoting, or distributing news and information across print, broadcast, and digital media platforms.

Journalist:

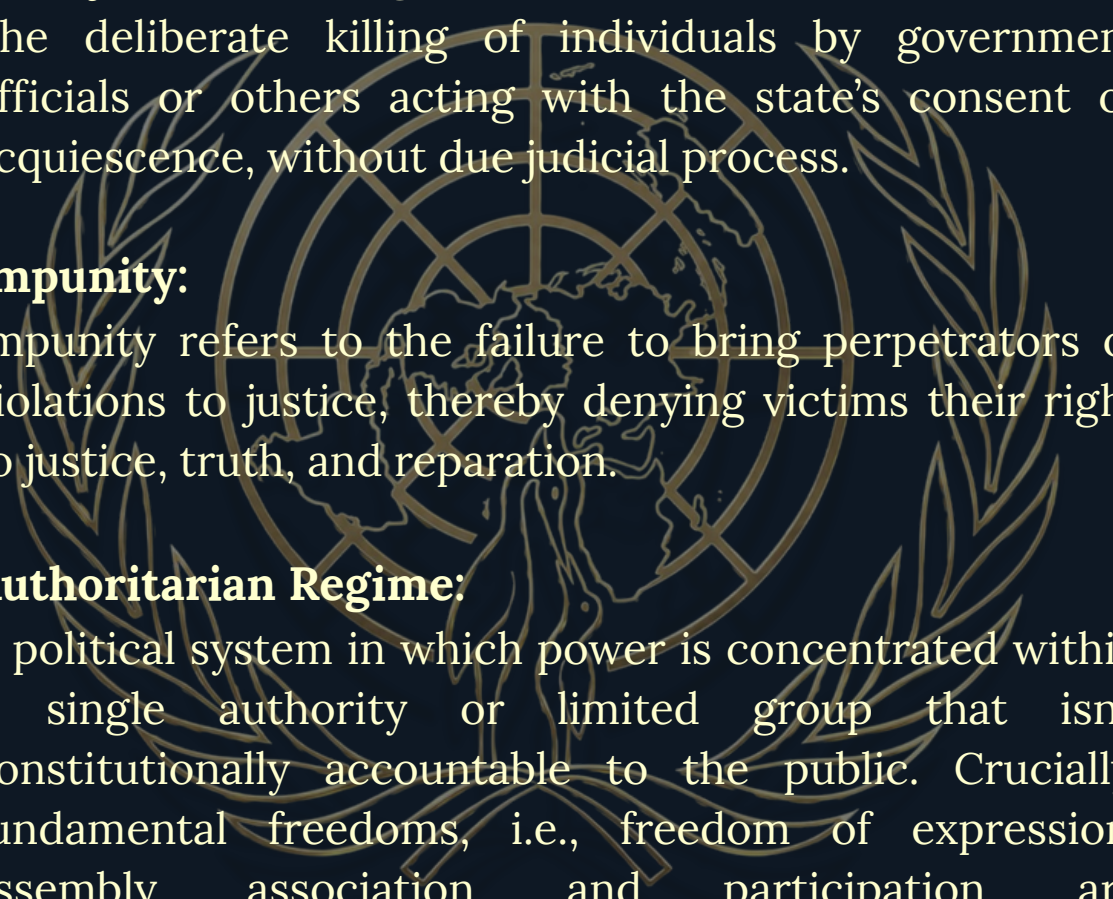
Any individual who observes, describes, documents, and analyses events, statements, policies, and proposals to inform the public, using any means of mass communication, whether they are professional reporters, freelancers, bloggers, or social media producers.

Whistleblower:

A person who reports suspected wrongdoing, misconduct, corruption, or violations to competent authorities or the public, often in the public interest.

Human Rights Violations:

When a state or non-state actors fail to act in accordance with international human rights standards and legislation, prompting the denial or abuse of individuals' basic rights and freedoms.



Freedom of Expression:

The right to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Extrajudicial Killing:

The deliberate killing of individuals by government officials or others acting with the state's consent or acquiescence, without due judicial process.

Impunity:

Impunity refers to the failure to bring perpetrators of violations to justice, thereby denying victims their right to justice, truth, and reparation.

Authoritarian Regime:

A political system in which power is concentrated within a single authority or limited group that isn't constitutionally accountable to the public. Crucially, fundamental freedoms, i.e., freedom of expression, assembly, association, and participation, are systematically restricted.

Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs):

Legal actions intended to intimidate or silence journalists, activists, or critics by burdening them with costly litigation.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The concept of a free press emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries, rooted in the idea that open discourse is essential for good governance and an informed public. Despite these ideals, governments consistently attempted to suppress free expression and restrict journalists' reporting.

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights established individual liberties globally, followed by the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which mandated the protection of freedom of expression with limited restrictions. However, during the Cold War (1947–1991), both the US and USSR frequently ignored these commitments, using state surveillance and censorship under the guise of national security and stability. Similarly, during the 1970s and 1980s, military dictatorships in Latin America targeted journalists, activists, and dissidents. Media workers faced severe repression, including arbitrary imprisonment, enforced disappearances, and strict censorship.

Modern governments—including nominal democracies—continue to restrict journalists through restrictive legislation, digital surveillance, and anti-terrorism

policies. Today, while the internet enables broader participation, it also provides authorities with new tools to monitor, harass, and silence journalists, leaving the safety of media workers a persistent global concern.



ROOT CAUSES

1. Protection of journalists in areas of conflict:

In the Protocol 1 amendment to the Geneva Convention, journalists in dangerous areas are explicitly termed civilians, so long as they don't take any actions against this status, such as taking up arms. Despite these protections, journalists have been killed in areas of conflict, with UNESCO reporting that at least 42 journalists were killed in areas of conflict in 2024.

Journalists are not always granted the protection they deserve due to the misuse of anti-terrorism, cybercrime, and defamation laws to legally arrest and silence reporters.

2. State Sovereignty:

Article 2(7) of the UN Charter grants the right to protect a country's sovereignty - each state has the right to govern and protect its own internal affairs without any external interference. Each state is also considered equal and independent in the international system.

Governments often exploit this "sovereign immunity" to censor the press, legally justify surveillance, or shield state actors from accountability for violence against reporters, labelling it as the "prioritisation" of state sovereignty.

3. Political Persecution and Surveillance of Journalists:

In recent years, governments have significantly expanded surveillance capabilities, enabling authorities to monitor the activities, communications, and political opinions of citizens, including journalists. Independent and investigative journalists are frequently subjected to surveillance, harassment, intimidation, arbitrary detention, and other forms of political persecution because of their reporting. Threats also arise from non-state actors such as criminal organizations, armed groups, and militias. As a result, corruption, violence, and human rights abuses often remain hidden from public scrutiny.

4. Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs):

SLAPPs are lawsuits filed primarily to intimidate, silence, or financially burden journalists, media organizations, and human rights defenders rather than to obtain a legitimate legal remedy. Although many SLAPP cases ultimately fail in court, they force defendants to spend significant time and resources on lengthy legal proceedings, creating a chilling effect that discourages investigative journalism and public-interest reporting.

5. Digital Repression:

Digital technologies and platforms are rampantly utilised to monitor, intimidate, censor, harass, or otherwise suppress Media workers and Journalists. This includes internet shutdowns, social media restrictions, and digital censorship aimed at limiting access to information. Additionally, legal repression by introducing new sets of laws such as the defamation law or the incitement to hatred law is utilised. Governments also impose increasingly unlawful surveillance, spyware, cyberattacks, online harassment, doxing, and coordinated disinformation campaigns designed to intimidate or silence independent reporting.



CURRENT SITUATION

1. Palestine (Gaza and the Occupied Palestinian Territory):

Palestinian authorities say that at least 245 journalists have died in Gaza in the nearly two-year conflict, making it one of the deadliest ever conflicts for the profession. The death toll has continued to mount in recent months as Israel's attacks in the war-torn territory have escalated. Five journalists, including Independent Arabia's Maryam Abu Daqqa, were among the 20 people killed in an Israeli strike on Nasser Hospital, which has sparked widespread international condemnation. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) says Gaza has the highest number of journalist deaths since the organization started gathering data in 1992. In April, Brown University's Watson Institute declared the war was "quite simply, the worst ever conflict for reporters".

2. Sudan:

Since the outbreak of armed conflict in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), journalists have faced killings, arbitrary detention, intimidation, and restrictions on access to information. Despite these risks, such as imprisonment, disappearance, or death, Sudanese journalists remain the

primary source of information about abuses committed by both the SAF and RSF. They are continuously targeted by both parties for reporting on their atrocities while working under siege, displacement, and constant threat. These attacks include killings, enforced disappearances, arrests, and gender-based violence. Yet these abuses continue with near-total impunity, even when publicly documented.

3. Lebanon:

Since the Israel–Lebanon border escalation in October 2023, journalists covering the conflict have been killed and injured while reporting near the border. In recent weeks, several journalists working in Tyre, southern Lebanon, have reported receiving threats and evacuation warnings from the Israeli military. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) joins its affiliate, the Union of Journalists in Lebanon (UJL), in condemning these threats. According to IFJ data, four journalists and media workers have been killed in Lebanon since the United States and Israel launched coordinated attacks on Iran in February 2026. Amal Khalil, the last journalist to be killed by the Israeli military in Lebanon on 22 April 2026, had denounced receiving death threats in September 2024, attributed to the Israeli army. The IFJ has been working with the UJL to establish an independent and impartial commission at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to investigate the killing of journalists and media workers in Lebanon since 13 October 2023.

4. Yemen:

The Yemeni Journalists Syndicate (YJS) has released its annual report on media freedom in Yemen for 2025, documenting 127 violations against journalists and media workers. This includes cases of detention, trials, salary suspensions, assaults, threats, bans on coverage and website blocking. Alarming, the Yemeni Journalists Syndicate (YJS) documented the killing of 16 journalists and media workers during the year. 14 of those killed were affiliated with the 26 September Newspaper in Sana'a and died in an Israeli attack that reportedly claimed more than 30 lives.

5. Israel–Iran Escalation (2025):

Since the start of the U.S.-Israeli offensive on Iran, journalists in the country have been working amid the hostile air strikes while also facing repression from the Iranian regime. Internet access in the country remains limited, and information is scarce, with a looming threat of arrest. On several occasions, the Iranian state television channel announced that any activity deemed to be “advantageous to the enemy” would be severely punished. “No independent journalist is allowed to work,” said a second journalist based in Tehran.

MAJOR CASE STUDIES

1. United States: Pentagon Papers & Local Retaliation

In 1971, whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg leaked the classified "Pentagon Papers," revealing that successive U.S. presidential administrations had systematically misled the public regarding the extent and human cost of involvement in the Vietnam War. In *New York Times Co. v. United States*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against government efforts to block publication on national security grounds, setting a critical precedent against prior restraint. However, state-level suppression persists today. In Georgia, veteran reporter Mario Guevara was arrested while live-streaming a public protest—despite wearing a clear "PRESS" tag—and was immediately transferred to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

2. Ukraine: Targeted Attacks in Conflict Zones

Journalists covering armed conflicts face grave physical threats, often directly targeted despite press markings. In Kramatorsk, Ukrainian journalists Olena Hubanova and Yevhen Karmazin of the state-funded Freedom channel were killed in a petrol station when a high-precision Russian Lancet drone struck their vehicle. Despite

carrying flak jackets clearly marked "PRESS," the crew was targeted in an incident investigated by prosecutors as a war crime. Their deaths form part of a broader toll, with Ukrainian authorities documenting over 130 media personnel killed since the full-scale Russian invasion began.

3. China & Hong Kong: Transnational Repression & State Control

The Chinese government uses state surveillance, broad criminal laws, and strict access limits to suppress independent reporting and human rights documentation, particularly in sensitive regions like Xinjiang. To block international oversight, China frequently invokes Article 2(7) of the UN Charter, claiming internal sovereignty against UN investigations into human rights abuses. This repression extends to activists and journalists abroad; under Hong Kong's 2024 Safeguarding National Security Ordinance (SNSO), national security police arrested the family of exiled activist Anna Kwok in retaliation for her speeches overseas.

4. Iran: Crackdown on "Woman, Life, Freedom" Reporting

Following the September 2022 death of Mahsa (Jina) Amini in police custody, Iranian authorities enacted severe measures to control information surrounding the

nationwide "Woman, Life, Freedom" protests. Journalists who first documented the incident and covered the civil unrest, including Niloufar Hamed and Elaheh Mohammadi, were detained and handed lengthy prison sentences. Alongside physical arrests, the government enforced internet blackouts, throttled connection speeds, and blocked social media platforms to sever live reporting channels and prevent visual evidence of human rights abuses from reaching the global public.



CONSEQUENCES AND EFFECT

1. Psychological and Physical Health Consequences:

Media Workers and journalists who work in environments using intimidation, violence, and surveillance to silence people are under a lot of physical pressure all the time. They are always afraid of being arrested, tortured, or even killed. Journalists may be detained, harassed, and interrogated because of what they report. This can lead to anxiety, depression, trauma, and even post-traumatic stress disorder. Physically, the bad conditions in detention centers, hunger strikes, and torture can make their health worse in the run. These consequences hurt the system of accountability.

2. Social and Familial Breakdown:

When authoritarian regimes suppress people, they do not just target individuals; they target their social network. The families of journalists may also face threats, surveillance, or pressure because of the journalists' work. This creates an environment of fear and mistrust in communities. As a result, Media Workers and journalists lose the support of their friends and family, which is essential for their well-being. When families and social networks break down, it weakens the community.

3. Legal and Judicial Erosion:

The legal system can be used to restrict the freedom of journalists and media. Laws that are supposed to protect people's rights are used to criminalize journalism and activism. Vague laws about defamation, false information, and national security are often used to detain or silence journalists. When courts are under pressure, and there is no fair trial, it can undermine the independence of the judiciary and people's trust in the legal system. When there is no trial and evidence is made up, it can further undermine the legal system. This erosion of independence creates an environment where victims are persecuted by the law.

4. Diplomatic and International Relations Consequences:

When countries suppress expression and violate human rights, they face international criticism, sanctions, and lose credibility in international forums. This results in isolation, strained diplomatic relations, and reduced access to trade, aid, and cooperation. Furthermore, the targeting of journalists and Media Workers often leads to border-crossing humanitarian consequences, including refugee outflows, exile of dissidents, and transnational repression where regimes pursue critics abroad through intimidation or digital surveillance.

5. Gender-Based Violence:

Under regimes, the suppression of journalists and Media Workers creates an environment where violence against women can happen without any consequences. Women journalists and media workers face increasing attacks offline and are subject to specific threats. The violence they face includes stigmatization, sexist hate speech, trolling, physical assault, rape, and even murder. 73% of women journalists who were surveyed experienced violence. In such climates, incidents of violence against women often go unreported and unaddressed, which reinforces a culture of impunity and further undermines the rights of women and people of all genders.



PAST UN ACTIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948):

Article 19 of the UDHR established the foundation for press freedom by guaranteeing freedom of opinion and expression, including the right to seek, receive, and impart information through any media.

2. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966):

Article 19 protects freedom of expression, while Article 9 protects against arbitrary arrest and detention, making the ICCPR a key legal framework for journalist protection

3. UN Security Council Resolution 1738 (2006):

First Security Council resolution dedicated to the protection of journalists during armed conflict. Condemned attacks against journalists, media professionals, and associated personnel, reaffirmed that journalists are civilians protected under international humanitarian law, and called upon all parties to armed conflict to prevent violence against media workers.

4. UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (2012):

Adopted in 2012 and coordinated by UNESCO, the UN

Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity marked a major shift toward a comprehensive approach to journalist protection. The Plan focuses on three pillars: preventing attacks against journalists, protecting journalists and media workers at risk, and prosecuting those responsible for crimes against journalists.

5. UN General Assembly Resolution 68/163 (2013):

Resolution 68/163, titled “The Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity”, was the first General Assembly resolution devoted entirely to journalist safety. It strongly condemned attacks against journalists, called upon States to prevent violence, ensure impartial investigations, prosecute perpetrators, and create safe environments for independent media. The resolution also proclaimed 2 November as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, observed annually beginning in 2014.

6. UN Security Council Resolution 2222 (2015):

Building upon Resolution 1738, Security Council Resolution 2222 (2015) strengthened protections for journalists working in armed conflicts. It reaffirmed that journalists are civilians under international humanitarian law, condemned attacks against media workers, emphasized the importance of ending impunity, and

encouraged UN peacekeeping missions to report violence committed against journalists where appropriate.



RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK

1. International Human Rights Law (IHRL)

Applies at all times (peace and war) to govern state action.

- **UDHR (1948) & ICCPR (1966) Article 19:** Protects the right to seek, receive, and impart information. Restrictions must be lawful, necessary, and proportionate.
- **ICCPR Articles 6, 7, & 9:** Protect journalists from arbitrary detention, torture, and extrajudicial killing.
- **General Comment No. 34 (2011):** Affirms that IHRL protects all media workers (including citizen journalists) from intimidation and attack.

2. International Humanitarian Law (IHL)

Applies strictly during armed conflict.

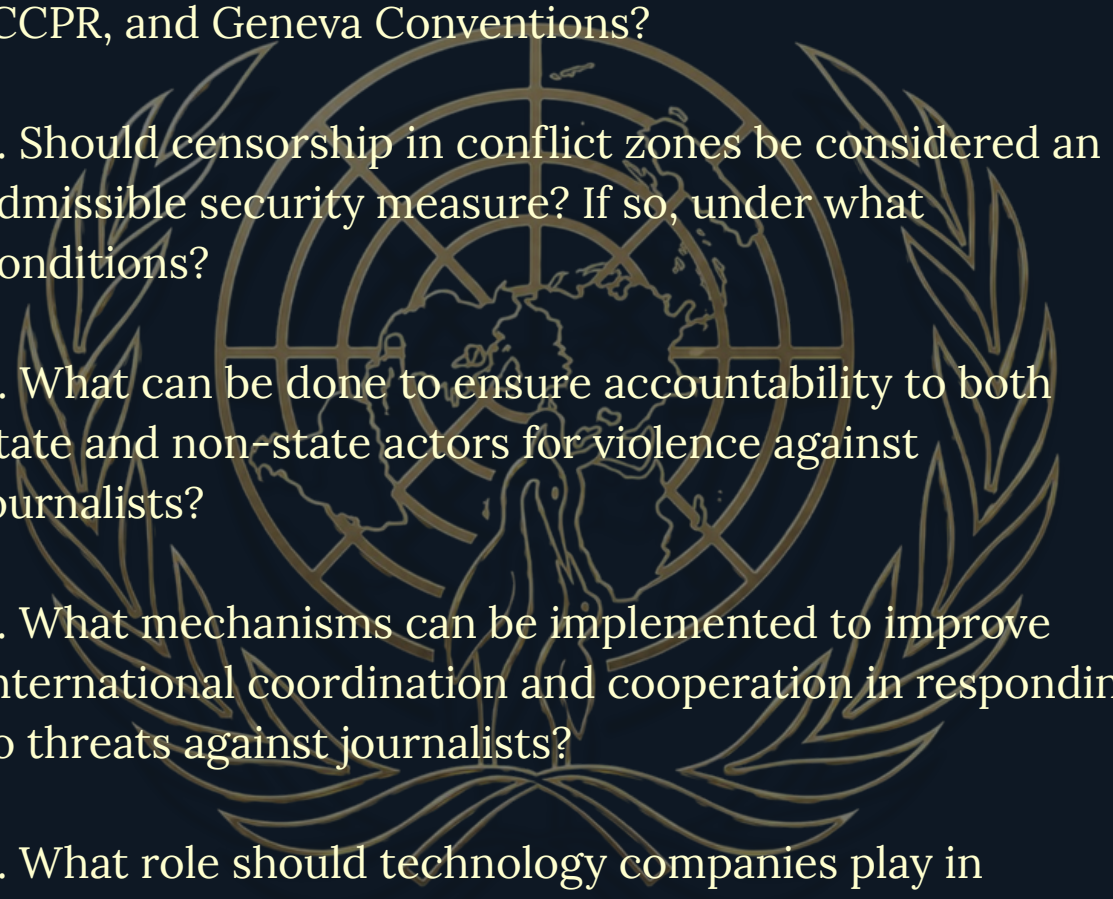
- **Geneva Conventions Additional Protocol I (Art. 79):** Classifies journalists in conflict zones as civilians, granting them full protection from direct attack.
- **Third Geneva Convention (Art. 4A):** Grants accredited war correspondents Prisoner of War (POW) status if captured.
- **Rome Statute (ICC):** Directing deliberate attacks against civilian journalists constitutes a war crime.

3. Accountability & Enforcement

- **UN Special Rapporteurs:** Issue urgent appeals to governments and investigate journalist abuse.
- **UN Human Rights Committee & Regional Courts:** Adjudicate individual complaints and issue binding rulings against states that fail to protect journalists or investigate crimes against them (e.g., ECtHR, Inter-American Court).



QUESTIONS A RESOLUTION MUST ANSWER (QARMA)

- 
1. How can Member States better implement international legal protections, including the UDHR, ICCPR, and Geneva Conventions?
 2. Should censorship in conflict zones be considered an admissible security measure? If so, under what conditions?
 3. What can be done to ensure accountability to both state and non-state actors for violence against journalists?
 4. What mechanisms can be implemented to improve international coordination and cooperation in responding to threats against journalists?
 5. What role should technology companies play in preventing online harassment and protecting digital freedom of expression?
 6. How can Member States address the disproportionate risks faced by journalists from minority or marginalized communities while ensuring

equal access to protection mechanisms?

7. What legal and institutional reforms can create safer environments for independent journalism?

8. What practical recommendations can the Human Rights Council adopt to improve the global protection of journalists and media workers?

9. How can post-conflict societies rebuild public trust in the media after years of restrictions and propaganda?



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